

## Introduction: Performance and Pedagogy

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When the editorial consortium of *Performance Matters* first conceived this special issue on “Performance and Pedagogy,” I had no idea that its preparation would coincide with one of the most transformative teaching experiences of my academic career. This past spring semester I co-taught a graduate seminar with Dara Culhane, my colleague at Simon Fraser University, and the Associate Editor of this journal. Our goal was to combine theories and methods from performance studies and sensory ethnography to investigate various embodied sites of research and ways of knowing as they are increasingly practiced across a range of academic disciplines, including anthropology (Dara’s departmental home), literature and the fine and performing arts (between whose units I teach), and gender studies (where Dara and I both have faculty affiliations). In the end, our biggest challenge lay not in soliciting support from our respective program chairs (we did so fairly easily, and with surprising enthusiasm for our initiative), nor in getting the required enrolment (we were oversubscribed), nor even in convincing our students to interrupt their discussions of a given text to engage in some breathing exercises, or a game of Simon Says (they were all eager and willing participants). Rather, the greatest irritant was figuring out how to cross-list the course across three different units, a performative impediment our university’s information management system proved singularly ill-equipped to handle.

Irritants can sometimes be “productive,” especially when it comes to teaching and performing across disciplines. This is something I learned from Dara, who in conjunction with our pedagogical experiment introduced me to Arnd Schneider and Christopher Wright’s *Contemporary Art and Ethnography*, in which the authors argue that one’s occasional flummoxing by or frustration with the different epistemological and methodological frameworks deployed by another research practice can help to expose the variable ways in which knowledge is constituted and valued, as well as to open up avenues for the cross-influencing and co-creating of different categories of knowledge (2006, 1-27; see also Westmoreland 2013; and Malcolm Whittaker’s article in this issue). In performing an expressly interdisciplinary pedagogy, Dara and I were thus seeking to needle our students into rethinking entrenched and siloed ways of disciplinary knowing by, among other things, drawing attention to how a focus on “the senses in arts practice” has developed “[p]arallel to ... and in some cases in collaboration with interest in the senses in ethnographic disciplines” (Pink, 2009, 20). Following from Sarah Pink, we also wished to foreground how such research is always entangled with the practice of place (41–2), a particularly vexed question given the settler-colonial history of British Columbia. Finally, Dara and I wanted to challenge each other to account for how, in our own research practices, embodied knowledge is transferred, documented, and valued in both academic and community-based contexts. In this, we were aided immeasurably by Ben Spatz’s recent book *What a Body Can Do* (2015), in which he argues that technique is what structures an “epistemology of practice” across the performing arts, physical cultures, and everyday life, and in which he makes a case for the development of a multi-media archive of new embodied techniques in these areas as a way both of cohering the specific knowledge claims of practice-as-research programs in the university, and of making those claims transmissible to others.

Initially it was scary for both the students and Dara and I to embrace Spatz’s “blue skies” scenario of “research without a clear goal,” in which practice itself is both the means and the end of inquiry, in the sense of producing “new knowledge” through the practical discovery of “new technique”

(Spatz 2015, 219, 233). What sorts of projects would the students develop, and how would we, as instructors, assess them? In the end, our students found success in forgoing traditional divisions between thinking and doing, and in embracing a multi-sensorial and multi-media archive that placed performance and its analysis/documentation along a continuum of embodied eventness and scholarly duration. Likewise, Dara and I realized that whatever training we might be imparting to our students was tied not just to the individual expertise we were bringing to our discussions, but also to our weekly groping experiments in the classroom to tie that knowledge to some kind of material reality that exists beyond our respective disciplines (see Spatz 238). Pedagogy, in other words, takes practice. And since the practice of pedagogy, like that of performance, frequently “exceeds our ability to ‘capture’ or articulate it in words, images, or digital information” (Spatz 239), journal issues such as this one become a rich resource for the transmission of new techniques across a broad range of instructional contexts.

To that end, we open with Malcolm Whittaker’s auto-ethnographic and practice-based account of his hybrid art/educational project, *Ignoramus Anonymous*. A support group for the uninformed that has toured libraries, art galleries and festivals throughout Australia, the performance piece seeks to model the ideas set forth in Jacques Rancière’s *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, in which the French philosopher argues that intellectual emancipation begins from a mutual acknowledgement of what we do not know—in order to teach ourselves what it is that we decide together *we want to know*. Comparing his own observations of the process with the feedback he has received from several participants, Whittaker argues that the performance of pedagogy on offer in the piece shifts the focus from content to context, with the sociality of support becoming the primary means of tutelage in this respect. Xing Fan also grounds her discussion of the challenges and strategic rewards of intercultural performance pedagogy in the unknown or unfamiliar. Reflecting on her experience teaching Asian performance traditions and histories to North American undergraduate and graduate students in both Asian Studies and Theatre and Performance Studies programs, Fan outlines three case studies (complete with sample syllabi and course assignments) in which she has had success prompting students to be more self-reflexive in thinking about the aesthetics and ideology of “foreignness,” as well as their own classroom communication and presentation skills.

The next two articles are linked in their focus on the work of a single artist, and more specifically what that work has to teach its audiences. Mabel Giraldo and Dalila D’amico focus on the “tactical performances” of the British artist Sue Austin, who in her ongoing *Freenheeling* project challenges public perceptions of what a disabled body can do—by, for example, diving underwater in her wheelchair, or flying with it in a flexwing glider. Giraldo and D’amico argue that in creating such spectacles Austin is simultaneously enacting a “personalist pedagogy” for her spectators, in which capability and competence are viewed not in terms of the singularity of the performed task but as the sum of the conditions of possibility that enabled the performance. In their reassessment of the oeuvre of Mike Kelley, Mary Anderson and Richard Haley contest the received critical narrative on the American artist, arguing that the characterization of Kelley as “antagonistic,” a “cruel master” imparting harsh truths to his ignorant public, overlooks the ways in which his entire archive—including essays and interviews—can be viewed as a game, one in which he invites his viewers to co-produce, over time and from artwork to artwork, the evolving meaning behind his practice. Drawing, like Malcolm Whittaker, on the writings of Rancière, Anderson and Haley suggest that this dizzying and disorienting relationship with content posited by Kelley—what the authors call his “psychedelic pedagogy”—simultaneously invites viewers into a social relationship with the artist, and regardless of a specific acknowledgement of that contract. In this respect, Anderson and Haley ask of Kelley an ethical question pertinent to any educational exchange: “if you decide someone is your

teacher, but that person has not agreed to teach you and, indeed, that person is no longer alive—what is the nature of your relationship?”

Pedagogical disorientation is also at the heart of the contribution by Vikki Chalklin and Marianne Mulvey, who in their discussion of three adult courses that they devised and delivered in connection with programming at the Tate Britain and Modern in 2014–2015 are likewise interested in theorizing audiences’ performative and affective encounters with visual art. Taking inspiration from the queer phenomenology of Sara Ahmed, the authors recount their attempts to “queer” the institutional space of the art gallery by encouraging course participants to think “across” or “beyond” traditional boundaries relating to: objecthood and materiality; gender, race, and sexuality; the human and the animal; and formal versus informal contexts of learning. In so doing, they formulate a notion of the “trans-pedagogic” as that which accounts for the situatedness of all knowledge, but that also allows for movement “between spaces, disciplines, and modes of thinking,” and for the transgressive and frequently transformative potential of “going beyond where one was before.” As Chalklin and Mulvey suggest, and as my own experience co-teaching with Dara attests, this “going beyond” is more easily enabled—and often so much more rewarding—if it is undertaken collaboratively, and so it is perhaps unsurprising that so many of the contributions to this special issue have been co-written.

Supplementing the different instructional and performative frameworks outlined in the main articles, each of the essays included in the Forum section is concerned with bridging, at a pedagogical level, theory and practice. For Alice Lagaay and Jörg Holkenbrink this means discussing how, at the University of Bremen, the resident theatre company attached to Holkenbrink’s Centre for Performance Studies is engaged not just in conservatory training or repertory productions, but also in active classroom interventions in other disciplines, applying performance-based methods to a discussion of different scientific concepts, for example, including in Lagaay’s philosophy seminars. Similarly, in a reflection on a dance improvisation class that she taught in the fall of 2014, Harmony Bench asks how philosophy and physical movement can be brought together to generate new “techniques-for-living” that will ideally enable her students to navigate with more sensory awareness the complex social choreography of a world in which some bodies seem to matter more than others. In her essay Sima Belmar is also concerned with troubling entrenched mind/body dualisms in the academy; specifically, she reports on a symposium she organized at Berkeley in which scholars from a range of disciplines discussed how they incorporate their different somatic practices into their classroom teaching. Finally, Patrick Blenkarn intervenes in current debates lauding failure as both an aesthetic goal and a critical politics in much postdramatic theatre practice and pedagogy by offering a spirited critique of Sarah Bailes’s influential book *Performance Theatre and the Poetics of Failure*. As Blenkarn suggests, the ennobling of intentional on-stage acts of failure in the work of celebrated avant-garde companies like Forced Entertainment, Goat Island, and Elevator Repair Service comes at the expense of attending to those moments in the studio when “not getting it right” can have serious professional and personal consequences.

The issue concludes with Kelsey Blair’s review of Kathleen Gallagher and David Booth’s *How Theatre Educates: Convergences and Counterpoints with Audiences, Scholars, and Advocates*. While this collection was first published more than a decade ago, its arguments remain pertinent to the current analysis, not least in contributors’ unabashed advocacy of theatre as a teaching tool. It is our hope that the materials collected here will function as a similar resource for those of us, regardless of our

discipline, interested in theorizing—and practicing—the relationship between performance and pedagogy.

## References

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